

Education Minnesota's proposal for Race to the Top

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Our overall goals

- Redirect federal money away from additional bureaucracy, test publishers and checklists, and toward proven initiatives that support students and teachers and help close the achievement gap.
- Direct funding to local school districts for a wide range of supports to students and teachers to improve student achievement.
- Establish a sustainable statewide culture of instructional improvement that will continue after federal funding ends.

1. Federal reform area: Turning around struggling schools

Our principles:

- Minnesota's low-performing schools can be turned around, but only if they are reorganized to:
 - Strengthen the learning connection between teachers and students, between teachers and parents, and between school and community.
 - Focus intensively on what works in practice in the classroom, rather than on pre-packaged theories, programs or curricula.
- School turnaround efforts must be designed at the local level with active involvement of teachers and principals, not imposed by state intervention.
- Involuntary transfers and punitive approaches won't work. We already have quality teachers in these schools; we need to make the environment more supportive of teaching and learning.

Our proposal:

Transform the lowest-performing schools into Centers of Teaching Excellence – statewide models of how to teach struggling students.

- Design each school around the needs of its students and teachers.
- Create a positive and supportive teaching and learning environment where students and teachers can succeed.
- Provide a comprehensive support system for students and teachers, including:
 - Small class sizes (18 students or fewer per class depending on the grade) and additional support staff to assist students and teachers.
 - Instructional time structured to meet student needs – for example, a longer school day or year, or different class schedules.
 - The latest instructional materials and technology.
 - Professional development that is integral to the work day, including planning and collaboration time where teachers can discuss which instructional approaches work.
 - A “grow your own” system to recruit and train teachers at these schools to become school leaders who understand and can overcome the challenges of closing the achievement gap.
 - Parent and family outreach integrated into the school program: for example, home visits by teachers, transportation for parents to attend conferences, or credits parents can earn against fees, etc., by attending conferences and getting involved.
 - Location of family and community services in the school building.
 - Counseling and social work services for students.

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www.educationminnesota.org

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2. Federal reform area: Great teachers and leaders - Teacher preparation

Our principles:

- **Alternative routes, not alternative standards:** Every Minnesota student deserves a teacher who is fully prepared and licensed, regardless of the route to licensure.
- Alternative programs should be targeted to areas of shortage, including math and science, special education, and teachers of color.

Our proposal:

Launch a state “grow our own” program, starting in high school, to recruit and train a diverse pool of talented potential teachers.

- This program, offered in cooperation with colleges and universities in Minnesota, would use Post-Secondary Enrollment Options or other college-credit programs to give students an affordable head start on a teaching degree.
- Beginning in high school and continuing through college, prospective teachers would receive substantial internship experience in a wide variety of school settings, under the supervision of skilled teachers and college faculty.

We support other quality alternative preparation routes if they:

- are targeted to shortage areas, such as math and science, special education, and teachers of color.
- educate candidates to the same high standards required of other teachers in Minnesota, including knowledge of subject areas to be taught, teaching skills, and knowledge about learning and learners.
- include significant, high-quality experience in the classroom, under the supervision of skilled mentors and post-secondary faculty.

We also support:

- Loan forgiveness programs for teachers willing to teach in shortage areas, including math and science, special education, and teachers of color.
- The governor’s 2009 proposal to start a “U Teach” program.

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3. Federal reform area: Great teachers and leaders - Instructional effectiveness

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Our principles:

- Student achievement test scores are not designed as measures of teacher effectiveness and should not be heavily relied upon in evaluating teachers.
- Teacher effectiveness cannot be separated from the conditions necessary for effective teaching, including professional development and time for teachers to collaborate.
- The goal of efforts in this area should be professional growth, not punishment.

Our proposal:

Develop several rigorous teacher evaluation models that can be tailored to meet local needs, in collaboration with teachers.

- Consider models such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which evaluates candidates in content knowledge, teaching skills and knowledge of student learning.
- Use state funding to expand the union's teacher-led Educational Research and Dissemination program statewide to promote professional growth for teachers at all experience levels.
- Use Peer Assistance and Review to strengthen and enhance teachers' skills.

We also support:

- State-funded opportunities for all teachers to participate in peer coaching, professional development during the school day, and time for collaboration.
- State-funded mandatory comprehensive induction and mentoring programs for all new teachers for their first three years in the profession. These programs must be collaboratively developed and supervised by highly skilled teachers.
- State financial support and incentives for National Board Certification.
- A permanent state commitment to professional development through the 2 percent set-aside.

4. Federal reform areas: Standards and assessments/data systems

Our principles:

- We support strong standards and valid assessments that can be used to improve teaching and learning.
- High-stakes decisions about students' futures and teachers' and principals' careers should not be made on the basis of tests that are not validated for those purposes.
- Federal funding should be used primarily to support local districts in their collection and use of data to improve teaching and learning, as opposed to statewide data collection for other purposes.

Our proposal:

Provide state-funded training and time for all teachers and administrators to use test data to improve teaching and learning.

- Make funding available for training in every district for teachers to help and coach each other in the use of data.
- Provide time during the school day for data analysis and planning.
- Develop an outreach program to educate parents and the public about the meaning and uses of test data.

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